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ABSTRACT

A brief, low-cost career intervention was designed to reduce employee turnover in the customer service call center of a financial institution. Through an extensive literature review, organizational commitment (OC) was identified as a primary predictor of employee turnover, and a list of research-supported OC antecedents was compiled. Antecedents selected as candidates for intervention included employee characteristics and work environment characteristics. Some antecedents were targeted via the content of the intervention, others via its format. Intervention features that addressed the targeted antecedents were identified. The intervention consisted of a workshop of two three-hour sessions held two weeks apart, follow-up meetings with a supervisor for career coaching, and a "career partner" for support and encouragement. Workshop components were introduction, framework, self-awareness, work world information, planning, career coaching, and career partner meetings. Participants rated workshops highly in terms of usefulness of material and knowledge and insight gained. Pre- and post-test measures of organizational commitment and turnover intentions were collected from experimental and control group participants. A number of significant correlations supported previous findings regarding relationships between OC and certain OC antecedents and the relationship between OC and turnover intentions. (Contains 33 references.) (YLB)

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Bridging the Gap: A Career Workshop Informed by Vocational and Organizational Theory

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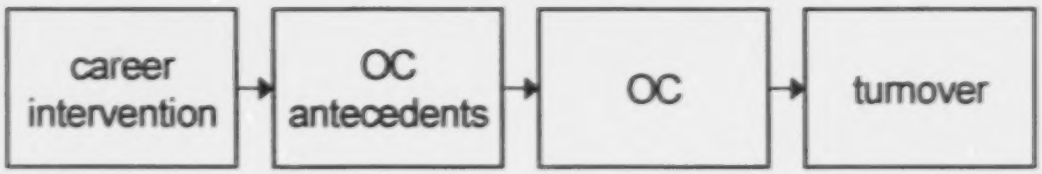
Introduction and Rationale

For decades, career interventions have been used in organizations with a variety of goals in mind: developing and promoting employees from within the organization, aiding in career planning, improving employee productivity, and meeting affirmative action goals (Walker & Gutteridge, 1979), as well as preventing job burnout and obsolescence (Leibowitz & Schlossberg, 1981), improving employee motivation (e.g., Parker, 1982), and reducing turnover (e.g., Griffin & Nickerson, 1984). Yet a review of the literature on career interventions in organizations reveals little evidence that these interventions are being informed by research in organizational theory, despite the fact that goals for the interventions are often directly relevant to that body of literature.

This poster describes a brief, low-cost career intervention that was designed with the goal of reducing employee turnover in the customer service call center of a financial institution. Through an extensive literature review, organizational commitment (OC) was identified as a primary predictor of employee turnover, and a list of research-supported OC antecedents was compiled (see Table 1).

A number of these antecedents were selected as candidates for intervention (those highlighted in Table 1). A career intervention was chosen as the medium – a natural choice, given that many of the OC antecedents are career-related. The overall rationale for the intervention's impact on turnover is illustrated below:



Some of the OC antecedents were targeted via the content of the intervention, others via its format. Table 2 identifies the targeted antecedents and the intervention features which addressed them.

Intervention Description

The intervention consisted of a workshop of two 3-hour sessions held two weeks apart, plus follow-up meetings with a supervisor for career coaching and a "career partner" (chosen during the workshop) for support and encouragement. The workshop components and follow-up meetings are described in the following sections.

Table 1: Some Antecedents of Organizational Commitment

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EMPLOYEE	
Demographics / Personality	
• age / tenure	Allen & Meyer (1993); Mathieu & Zajac (1990); Mayer & Schoorman (1998)
• job status	Cohen & Hukecek (1993); Mathieu & Zajac (1990)
• education	Mathieu & Zajac (1990); Mayer & Schoorman (1998)
• income	Cohen & Gattiker (1994); Mathieu & Zajac (1990)
• dispositional affectivity	Cropanzano, James, & Konovsky (1993)
Career / Work Variables	
• work role salience / job involvement	Jans (1989); Mannheim, Baruch, & Tal (1997); Mayer & Schoorman (1998); Randall & Cote (1991)
• career commitment	Carson & Carson (1998); Vandenberg & Scarpello (1994); Witt (1993)
• "Protestant" work ethic	Mathieu & Zajac (1990)
• promotion aspirations	Posovac et al. (1996)
• mentor / protégé status	Baugh, Lankau, & Scandura (1996); Heimann & Pittenger (1996)

Table 1: continued

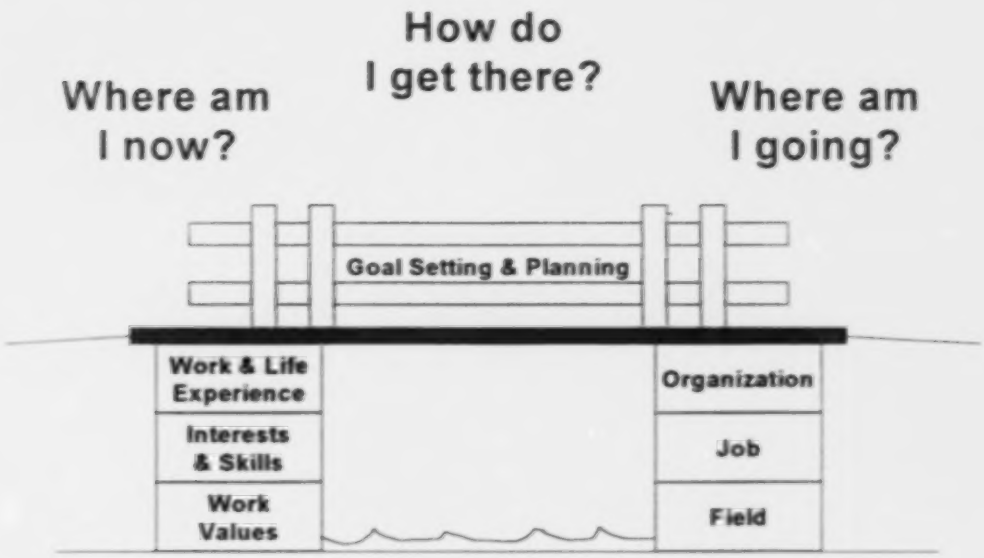
WORK ENVIRONMENT CHARACTERISTICS	
Working Conditions & Stressors	
• hazardous conditions	Shouksmith (1994)
• perceived fairness / discrimination	Shouksmith (1994); Witt (1993)
• role stressors	Johnston, Parasuraman, Futrell, & Black (1990); Mathieu & Zajac (1990); Mayer & Schoorman (1998); Schaubroeck, Cotton, & Jennings (1989)
Social Ties / Social Support	
• social support	Ellis & Miller (1994); Luthans, Wahl, & Steinhaus (1992); Schaubroek et al. (1989)
• felt participation	Mayer & Schoorman (1998); Schaubroek et al. (1989)
• leader communication	Mathieu & Zajac (1990)
• friendship opportunities	Riordan & Griffeth (1995)
Opportunities for Growth	
• opportunities for growth & promotion	Cramer (1993); Jans (1989); Mathieu & Zajac (1990); Shouksmith (1994)
Social Exchange	
• satisfaction with pay	Cohen & Gattiker (1994); Shouksmith (1994)
• perceived organizational support	Armeli, Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Lunch (1998); Cropanzano, Howes, Grandey, & Toth (1997); Hutchison & Garstka (1996); Randall & Driscoll (1997); Tsui, Pearce, Porter, & Tripoli (1997); Wayne, Shore, & Liden (1997)

Table 2: How OC Antecedents Were Targeted

OC Antecedent	Corresponding Intervention Feature
Employee Career / Work Variables	
• work role salience	Career workshop content based on person-environment fit concepts (Dawis, 1996), including self-exploration and career information components, as well as a goal-setting and planning unit.
• career commitment	
Employee Career / Work Variables (cont'd)	
• promotion aspirations	Information on career paths within the organization.
• mentor / protégé status	Career coaching with supervisors as a follow-up to the career workshop.
Organizational Social Ties Variables	
• social support	Interactive workshop design emphasizing meaningful conversation with colleagues. Follow-up meetings with a "career partner" chosen during the workshop.
• friendship opportunities	
Social Exchange Variable	
• perceived organizational support	The act of offering the workshop and supporting the employees' development.

Introduction – An overview of the workshop goals and structure, plus a short icebreaker activity.

Framework – An introduction to a bridge metaphor for career planning. This metaphor provided the structure around which the workshop content was organized, as well as an informal introduction to person-environment fit (Dawis, 1996) concepts. The metaphor, at its fullest level of detail, is presented below.



Self-awareness – An examination of one's work values and vocational history through individual and group activities. Participants also completed the Campbell Interests and Skills Survey (CISS; Campbell, Hyne, & Nilsen, 1989) prior to workshop. It was handed in

during the first session, scored between sessions, and interpreted in the group setting during the second session.

Work-world information – Focused on how and where to find information about the world of work. Information on career paths within the organization was also provided. Participants were then shown how occupations and work environments can be matched in terms of values, interests, and skills. They practiced this approach via a brief analysis of some of the jobs within their organization.

Planning – Participants identified characteristics of their ideal job and brainstormed possible careers that would satisfy those criteria. Goal-setting and planning skills were taught, and participants created short-term plans for themselves that focused on next steps in the process, including career coaching with a supervisor and "career partner" meetings with a fellow-participant.

Career Coaching – Supervisors received brief training in career coaching, and an outline was provided to both supervisor and employee to guide a structured discussion. Content of the career coaching discussion included: the coaching process; the employee's values, interests, skills, and experience; career goals and action plan;

and the potential role of the organization in helping the employee meet his/her goals.

Career partner meetings – Informal meetings designed to provide workshop participants with support and encouragement as they followed through with their career plans.

Outcome / Evaluation

The workshops were highly rated by participants both in terms of usefulness of the material (M = 4.36 on a 5-point scale) and knowledge and insight gained (M = 4.36). Pretest and posttest measures of organizational commitment and turnover intentions (among other variables) were collected from experimental and control group participants. Unfortunately, due to a context of major organizational change, results were difficult to interpret. A number of significant correlations, however, supported previous findings regarding the relationships between OC and certain OC antecedents, as well as the relationship between OC and turnover intentions.

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